OBITUARIES

Loyd Jowers Dies; Claimed Role in King Assassination

Associated Press

UNION CITY, Tenn.—Loyd Jowers, 73, the former Memphis cafe owner who claimed he hired someone other than James Earl Ray to assassinate Martin Luther King Jr., died May 20 at a hospital in Memphis after a heart attack. He had lung cancer.

Mr. Jowers ran Jim's Grill, a cafe on the ground floor of a rooming house from which prosecutors say the shot that killed King was fired on April 4, 1968.

Ray confessed to the killing in 1969 but recanted and spent the rest of his life trying to prove his innocence. He died in prison in 1998.

In an ABC-TV interview in 1993, Mr. Jowers said he received $100,000 from late Memphis produce merchant Frank Liberto to arrange King's murder. He claimed he hired the assassin, but said it wasn't Ray.

Mr. Jowers and "unknown conspirators" were found liable in December in a wrongful death lawsuit brought against Mr. Jowers by the slain civil rights leader's family. The jury awarded the Kings just $100 in damages, but the family had asked only for a token amount because what they wanted most was for the jury to find evidence of a conspiracy and lend support to their call for a new investigation into the killing.

Mr. Jowers was sick for much of the trial and did not testify.

The Kings were represented by William Pepper, who was Ray's lawyer and has for years claimed the assassination was the result of a vast conspiracy involving the FBI, CIA and the Army, organized crime and various state and local officials.

Lewis Garrison, Mr. Jowers's attorney, said that he had met with his client in the past few weeks and that Mr. Jowers still insisted he had told the truth.

"Nobody wanted to attach any truth to what he said," Garrison said. "He was doing it because it was right."

Shelby County prosecutor John Campbell, who has investigated the assassination, has said Mr. Jowers's claims had no merit. Campbell said several of Mr. Jowers's friends and associates said he was hoping to get a movie or book deal.

A U.S. House committee concluded in 1978 that Ray killed King but may have had help from a small group of racists before or after the murder. The committee found no government involvement